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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7712
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4659
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1906
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1534
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3630
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4373
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1436
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2260
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0530
RHEHNNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000133

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS
NSC FOR E.PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018

TAGS: PREL KCOR ID

SUBJECT: AS PARDON DEBATE SWIRLS, SUHARTO'S CONDITION
FLUCTUATES

REF: A. JAKARTA 0085

- 1B. JAKARTA 0063
- 1C. JAKARTA 0033
- 1D. 07 JAKARTA 1920

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Former Indonesian president Suharto remains hospitalized in a Jakarta hospital. As his condition continues to fluctuate, the debate over whether the government should drop corruption charges against him gains steam. Some political parties have come out in support of a pardon. Activists, however, dismiss the notion and continue to seek redress for alleged crimes committed by his regime. With the debate swirling, the government--in good Javanese fashion--has kept its collective head down and seems unlikely to go out on a limb. END SUMMARY.

VITAL INDICATORS: UP, DOWN & BACK AGAIN

12. (U) Former president Suharto remains in a Jakarta hospital. Nearly three weeks after his hospitalization on January 4, the health of the former Indonesian strongman continues to fluctuate up and down. On January 19, doctors announced that Suharto's situation had generally improved to the point that--if the positive trajectory continued--he could be sent home for treatment. Suharto was, for example, conscious and able to raise his hand. The functions of his vital organs had returned, although he still needed the assistance of a ventilator to breathe.

13. (U) The very next day, however, Suharto's health suddenly deteriorated again and has remained poor, with renewed accumulation of fluid in his lungs, impaired digestion and a new infection caused by the various tubes attached to his body. Doctors reportedly removed fluid from the lungs and resumed intravenous feeding earlier this week. Suharto's blood pressure was reported to be stable and he remained conscious.

¶4. (SBU) After the initial surge of visits by high-level Indonesian officials and former SE Asia leaders such as Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore and Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia early on (as his death appeared to be imminent), visitation has dropped to a trickle. International visitors of note during the past week have included only Sultan Pahang Tun H. Ahmad Shah of Malaysia.

PARDON DEBATE SWIRLS

¶5. (C) Suharto's health continues to spark debate over a possible pardon. The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)--an influential Islamic party--called on January 21 for "a general pardon" of the former leader. In making the announcement, Mahfudz Siddiq--a PKS legislator--said a pardon was necessary "to reconcile" the country regarding its past, allowing it "to better focus" on the future. This makes the PKS the second political party to take an official position on this issue. Golkar, which Suharto created as a political mainstay of his regime and which remains the largest party in the country, earlier called for the government to drop its prosecution of Suharto (ref a). Golkar did not, however, specifically call for a pardon. (Note: According to legal experts, technically, a pardon can only be made if there is a conviction--something which Suharto has avoided since exiting as president in 1998.)

¶6. (C) The perspective on the street is different. Activists--who are routinely sponsoring small rallies on the subject--continue to urge that the GOI prosecute Suharto not only for his theft of national funds but also for alleged "crimes against humanity" which occurred under his rule. While accepting the need for national reconciliation in order to move forward, activists stress that substitutes for a genuine legal process cannot lay the necessary basis for true reconciliation.

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IT'S OFF THE FRONT PAGE (FOR NOW)

¶7. (C) The daily ups and downs in Suharto's condition continue to make news, but increasingly that news is being relegated to the back pages. Suharto has been in the hospital repeatedly in the past several years, sometimes in fairly serious condition, only to return home. Given the severity and duration of his present situation, however, fewer and fewer Indonesians expect that to happen this time. Doctors continue to give him no more than a 50:50 chance of recovery and he remains heavily dependent on life support and medication.

¶8. (C) With the pardon debate still swirling, the government has kept its collective head down and seems unlikely to go out on a limb. Attempts to reach an out-of-court settlement on the corruption charges have so far proven futile, though the government continues to work on that track. GOI leaders also continue to speak of the need for "national reconciliation," but liberal activists are keeping the pressure up and the government seems reluctant to stir their wrath by canceling the very serious charges leveled against the former president.

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